

IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES ON PALM COAST FIRE/RESCUE

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

There have been many organizational changes within Flagler County and Palm Coast Fire/Rescue in the past twenty-five years. We are being faced with rapid growth and an increased call volume. The majority of growth is within the Palm Coast Fire/Rescue response area.

There are eight different fire departments representing four different jurisdictions within Flagler County. There are two separate city volunteer departments, five county volunteer departments and one combination career volunteer organization.

All of these organizations with the exception of the two cities fall under the organization of Flagler County Emergency Management Department. This has resulted in the delivery of service to be fragmented, inconsistent, created confusion, conflicting operations and wasted time and money.

The fire service has an obligation to strive to meet the needs of its customers, both internal and external. In order to accomplish this, an organization must have structure that is well organized, efficient and meets the needs as an effective organization.

The purpose of this research project was to determine if Palm Coast Fire/Rescue can operate with improved efficiency and more effectively meet the needs of the Service District,

the employees and the public they serve as a separate organization.

The research used historical, descriptive and evaluative procedures to analyze the current system as to how it has affected service and through the use of interviews and literature reviews to seek information to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the problems with the current county system?
2. What type of an organization category applies?
1. What type of an organizational structure should be selected?
3. What recommendations, based on the findings, should be made for a new organizational structure for Palm Coast Fire/Rescue?

Interviews were conducted with the chiefs from each volunteer organization, along with the two city volunteer departments in an effort to identify the current system and identify options for improvement of service delivery.

The results clearly showed that the present system did not meet the needs of the volunteer organizations and that Palm Coast Fire/Rescue should not be in the same

organizational structure as the county volunteers.

Recommendations were made to reorganize the county-wide system. As the new Emergency Management Director is hired, all fire services will be removed from under the Emergency Management Department. Also, the county will hire a County Fire Services Director to Supervisor, direct, plan and coordinate the activities of Flagler County Volunteer Departments with Palm Coast Fire/Rescue being removed and established as its own department under the direction of a chief who reports directly to the county manager. This is shown in the County Organizational Chart Appendix B.

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INTRODUCTION

The organizational structure of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue has seen many changes since its inception in 1973. The problem is we are lumped together under a county structure of eight (8) separate fire departments all of which are volunteer except Palm Coast which is a combination career and volunteer organization.

We have just gone through a devastating 1998 Wildfire Season which has shown the delivery of service has been fragmented by jurisdictional boundaries, inconsistency in the way organizations responded units, lack of county leadership and various operational and incident command guidelines. This has had a negative impact on Palm Coast, and the service we provide to our citizens.

The purpose of this research was to determine if Palm Coast Fire/Rescue can operate with improved efficiency and more effectively meet the needs of the Service District, the employees and the public they serve as a separate organization.

This study used historical, descriptive and evaluative research methodology which included literature review, interview with service leaders within Flagler County and historical data of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue. This information was used to seek answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the problems with the current county system?
2. What type of an organizational category applies?

3. What type of an organizational structure should be selected?
4. What recommendations, based on the findings, should be made for a new organizational structure for Palm Coast Fire/Rescue?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Palm Coast Fire/Rescue is a combination career/volunteer organization located in Flagler County, Florida. The fire department covers an area of approximately 106 square miles with a population of 36,000 residents. The County of Flagler is an area of approximately 450 square miles with a total population of 48,000 residents.

As with most service organizations, the volunteer fire department at Palm Coast was formed in response to community need.

Instigated by the Palm Coast Civic Association's Safety Committee, the fire department was incorporated in 1973 with 36 volunteers. After much debate among residents and government officials, a Palm Coast Fire District was formed in 1976. This was created by the state legislature. The new fire district was overwhelmingly approved by voters in a referendum election. With its boundaries more cleanly defined, the volunteer fire department signed a contract to provide fire protection to the taxed fire district of Palm Coast.

The rapid development of homes outside the fire protection district and contracts for all fire

protection in Palm

Coast set to expire on October 1, 1979, the Fire Commission asked the Flagler County Commissioners to assume responsibility for contracting with the volunteer fire department. The County Commissioners passed the responsibility to the Palm Coast Service

District, an organization created to deal with the needs of Palm Coast residents.

The Fire District was done away with, with the creation of the Service District. The Service District is a special taxing district, but it is not just for fire protection. The millage is set and includes street lighting and a Palm Coast Road and Bridge Department.

In 1985 the Palm Coast Volunteer Fire Department was working with the Service District, County Commission, and a private consulting group to establish a long-term growth plan for the fire service. During March, April and the first two weeks of May of 1985, the area was plagued with a series of brush fires. May 17, 1985, a brush fire driven by 35-40 mile an hour winds destroyed 10,000 acres and 131 homes in Palm Coast. After this citizens wanted to know what could be done to prevent

another such disaster. One issue was inter-agency cooperation, which might be hampered by misinformation as to how each Emergency Services Agency operates. In 1987 the Palm Coast Fire Department hired three paid personnel to handle the increasing number of daytime calls. 1988 saw the hiring of the first paid Fire Chief, and the addition of two more paid personnel. With the addition of the first paid Fire Chief, Palm Coast Fire Department was its own organization, although still under the county umbrella. 1993 saw changes in county government that we are still trying to overcome today leading to this research paper.

The Fire Chief was fired and no replacement was hired. County Commissioners believed there was no need for a paid Chief. The Commission voted to put Palm Coast Fire Department under the direction of the County Emergency Management Director with one paid officer of the fire department acting as liaison. The liaison lasted a year until the commission ordered the volunteers of Palm Coast to incorporate once again, and appoint a Fire Chief who would administer the operations under the Emergency Management Director. This is shown in Appendix D of the 1994 organizational chart. In 1995, the realization that the growth of the community, the low morale of the fire department, and the poor public perception of the organization another change was needed. At this time there were nine (9) career personnel along with fifteen (15) volunteers. Under the organizational structure there were three career officers holding the rank of Lieutenant, and the volunteers holding the rank of Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain and Lieutenants. To try to overcome some problems of this organization, a Captain/Station Officer was hired. This person was to be the administrator of the fire department under the direction of the Emergency Management Director. Being the administrator of the fire department with a rank of Captain, the ability to direct the department remained hampered, and the unity of command, span of control, division of labor, and discipline statements of the organizational structure of Palm Coast Fire/ Rescue were in total disarray.

During this time Palm Coast Fire/Rescue went from nine (9) career personnel to twenty (20) career personnel. With the growth of the department, and the lack of a clear organizational structure, the operation of Palm Coast has been less effective and efficient than it should be.

In order to improve operations and organize for the future, this research project was implemented. The objective was to look at the organizational structure of Palm Coast and the County

and to determine what type of management structure would work to give the best service to the citizens of the Palm Coast Service District.

Change is inevitable, not only within Palm Coast Fire/Rescue, but also within the fire services overall. Utilizing the change management model, which was learned at the Strategic Management of Change Course at the National Fire Academy (1998), we will determine organizational change requirements along with the magnitude of the change that is desired. The literature review will complement the change management model to guide us to an effective organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature search was conducted to determine what information is available relevant to our fire department and county structure. The search began with material available through the Learning Resource Center of the National Fire Academy and the library material at Palm Coast Fire/Rescue.

As the literature progressed, this author realized that some type of organizational structure should exist for Palm Coast Fire/Rescue.

The *Fire Protection Handbook*, 16th edition, NFPA, by Carl E. Peterson, states the types of public fire protection organizations vary widely. One of the most common types is the public fire department, a department of municipal government with the head of the department directly responsible to the chief administrative officer of the municipality. A fire bureau, is usually a division of a Department of Public Safety. In this type of organization the Public Safety Department head must divide time

between several important functions, including police and fire service.

The county fire department is another type organization. Numerous small suburban municipalities can enjoy the benefits of a large, professionally administered public fire department with staff and service facilities which, ordinarily, few small communities could afford individually.

Another type of public fire service organization is the fire district which is organized under provisions of state or provincial law. It is, in effect, a separate unit of government, having its own governing body composed of commissioners or trustees, and is commonly supported by a tax levied through the district. At the present time, Palm Coast Fire/Rescue does not fit any of these categories. As shown in the Flagler County Government Organizational Structure, Appendix A, Palm Coast Fire/Rescue is not a department, a fire bureau, a county fire department, or a fire district. Although we are supported by a special service taxing district, we do not have a separate unit of government to report to, and the millage from the service district tax is shared with Palm Coast Road and Bridge, Code Enforcement and Street Lighting.

As Coleman, (1995, pg. 8). explains structuring is essentially organizing the resources of an organization so that the work plan makes sense. These are some basic terms, used in structuring an organization: chain of command; unity of command; span of control, and division of labor.

In the present organizational structure, there are problems with consistency. Coordinating activities consists of maintaining the day-to-day working of the agency and the relationships with organizations that interfere with the fire department. These other entities may include, but are not limited to, water departments, building departments, dispatch communication systems, other municipal departments, neighboring fire departments, county government, state government, federal government,

and community organizations.

The coordinate effort is cumbersome with the volunteer fire departments under the same Emergency Management Director as Palm Coast Fire/Rescue. Because of the call volume and the career segment of Palm Coast, we are in constant contact with outside organizations and have built a good working relationship. Some volunteer departments that do not have as much contact can tear down relationships in a very short time, leaving Palm Coast to mend the wounds and develop the relationship again.

The *Managing Fire Services*, 2nd edition by ICMA 1988 discusses organizational structure and organization by function. An organizational structure needs to provide for the following: clarity in position and assignments for employees, economy of effect in control and supervision, “direction of vision” toward ends rather than means, understanding of individual tasks and how they are related to organizational goals, effective decision making, stability and adaptability, and means for its own continuation.

The *Management for Productivity*, 4th edition, by John R. Schermerhorn, Jr., published by John Wiley: Soss, Inc. states an organization is a collection of people in a division of labor working together to achieve a common purpose. Organizations involve people working together: The separate and specialized activities of many people must be synchronized if synergy is to be achieved. The process of coordination ensures that people work together so that their many efforts contribute to a higher level of accomplishment. All work in organizations should share a common direction, or organizational purpose. The sense of “mission” should be clear to all members and relevant outsiders, and it should define a role for the organization as a viable component in society.

Gratz (1972, p. 115) stated “An efficient organization is necessary if the fire office is to successfully carry out his managerial duties.” If the internal organization of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue is to grow and carry out managerial duties so we are an efficient organization, then we must be a well-structured organization. The effect outside management has could lead to an inefficient organization that would ultimately hurt the performance of the department in saving lives and property; the reason for a fire department’s very existence.

The literature review clearly establishes that an organizational structure has to be established that will give Palm Coast Fire/Rescue a clear, common direction that is effective and efficient and meets the needs of the customers, both internal and external. The literature also shows that Palm Coast has the ability to implement a change in organizational structure that will enhance delivery of service with a greater degree of accountability to the Palm Coast Service District and the citizens.

PROCEDURES

In addition to the literature research done for this project, an interview process was conducted to determine the answers to questions about the current county organization structure and needs. The interview process was face-to-face contact.

The interviews were with the chiefs from each volunteer station in Flagler County, along with the two city volunteer departments.

The departments and chiefs contacted were City of Flagler Beach Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Rob Creal), City of Bunnell Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Gary Hughes), Korona

Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Kevin Bucek), Espanola Volunteer Fire Department (Chief George McMillan), St. Johns Park Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Robert Billups), Hammock Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Bill Cayler), Rima Ridge Volunteer Fire Department (Chief Ron Walker).

The questions asked in the interview process were as follows:

1. Does Emergency Management adequately represent your needs to the County Commission?
2. Do you believe there is adequate leadership at the county level concerning fire operations?
3. Should all county volunteer fire departments be consolidated under one director?
4. Should Palm Coast be one of the consolidated departments?

RESULTS

The data from the interviews was reviewed to determine what information was obtained.

The first question, “Does Emergency Management adequately represent your needs to the County Commission?” The five volunteer departments all agreed that they did not have good representation. The consensus was that most requests were directed to Emergency Management, but they died at this level and were never addressed to the County Commissioners. The two City Chiefs also agreed that information never got past the Emergency Management office.

The second question, “Do you believe there is adequate leadership at the county level concerning fire operations?” All volunteer and City Chiefs agreed that fire operations, at times, were

not top priority at the county level. There is no one person that oversees fire operations. This is all under Emergency Management and is not adequate to meet the needs of the county fire departments.

The third question, “Should all county volunteer departments be consolidated under one director?” This was a unanimous yes from the volunteer chiefs. The city chiefs also believe the county would benefit from consolidation of services but that the two cities would remain separate under their own direction.

The fourth question, “Should Palm Coast be one of the consolidated departments?” All of the chiefs believed that Palm Coast should not be one of the consolidated departments. The feeling was that Palm Coast is the largest department and is a special taxing district for funds, and if it were part of a consolidation all attention and resources would be directed towards them.

DISCUSSION

It is apparent by examining the results of the literature review that for a department to function effectively, it must have an organizational plan that shows the relationship between the operating division and the total organization. (Peterson 1986 p. 15-7). It is evident that in conjunction with the county organization all involved feel that with an increase in size and complexity the delivery of service can be better controlled and coordinated thru separate organizations.

Appendix A shows the current Flagler County Organizational Structure. Under the Emergency

Management Services Department is disaster preparedness, emergency medical services, fire prevention/inspection, Palm Coast Fire/Rescue and all of the volunteer departments in the county. Jack Snook (1988) stated, “The organization that is emerging today, offers diverse fire protection services and requires a complex, multi faced delivery system.” This cannot be done under the current organizational structure.

There is a place for the fire department to be part of the emergency management team along with other key agencies such as police, public works, and utilities. Appendix B shows a proposed Flagler County Government organization that would provide Palm Coast Fire/Rescue: Clarity in position and assignments for employees, economy of effort in control and supervision, “direction of vision” toward ends rather than means, understanding of individual tasks and how they are related to organizational goals, effective decisionmaking, stability and adaptability, and means for its own continuation. (Snook, 1988, p. 58).

The author agrees that organizational changes that have been found in the literature review can positively impact the delivery of services to Palm Coast Service District. This can be accomplished by the separation of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue from Emergency Management Services Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the organization to function effectively, we must have an organizational structure that shows the relationship between the operating division and the total organization. This project has come at a time when many changes are taking place within Flagler County, and the future of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue will be impacted greatly.

The following are recommendations which need to be considered after going through the literature review and interviews.

1. The removal of Palm Coast Fire/Rescue from under the umbrella of county Emergency Management Director.
2. Implement the official organizational structure that would clearly identify the personnel and positions required to accomplish the goals and objectives.
3. Preparing for the referendum vote in September 1999 Palm Coast Fire/Rescue should develop the internal organization that would flow into a municipal fire department.
4. The development of an organization that would fulfill the requirements of the county volunteer fire departments under one county fire coordinator.
5. Develop four fire organizations within the county instead of the eight that currently exist.

As the project was being completed, changes within the county have added to the need for these recommendations to be top priority in the future planning for Palm Coast Fire/Rescue.

Change has started with the replacement of two members of the Board of County Commissioners, the County Attorney's contract not being renewed, the County Administrator being

released from his contract, and the Emergency Management Director retiring, the organization structure will be changing as shown in the current county organizational chart, Appendix A, and the proposed county organizational chart, Appendix B. Also shown in Appendix C is the job description of a new position of County Fire Coordinator to consolidate the county volunteer fire departments into one organization.

One very important reason to use this time to set an organizational structure which will take us into the future is the possibility that Palm Coast will become a city with a Referendum Vote in September of 1999. This organization is shown in Appendix E.

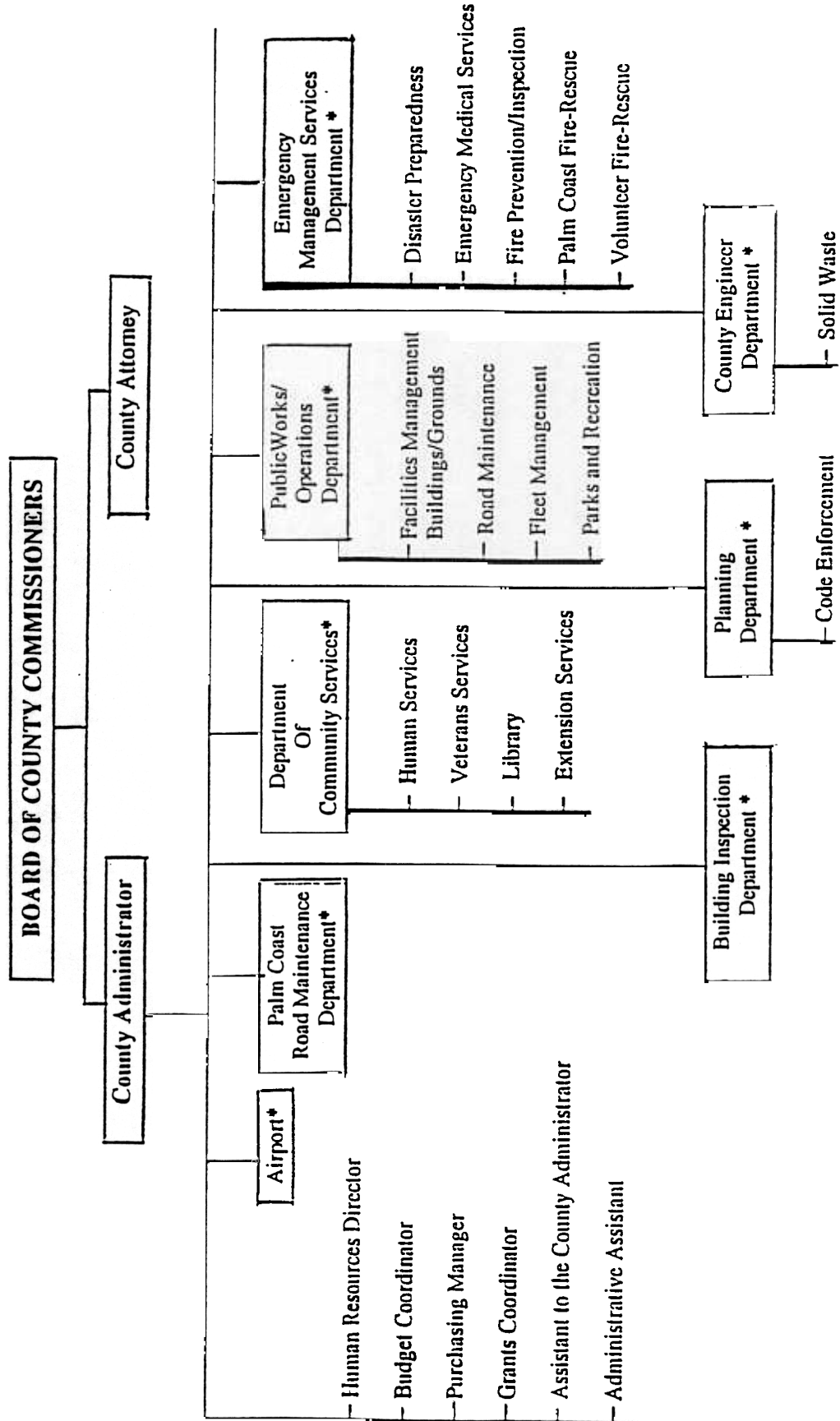
The future of service delivery to the citizens of Palm Coast can be positively influenced by a separation at this time from Emergency Management. The result would be reduction of time spent on duplication at the administration level, and less confusion; thus providing a more uniform, consistent service delivery system for Palm Coast.

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APPENDIX A

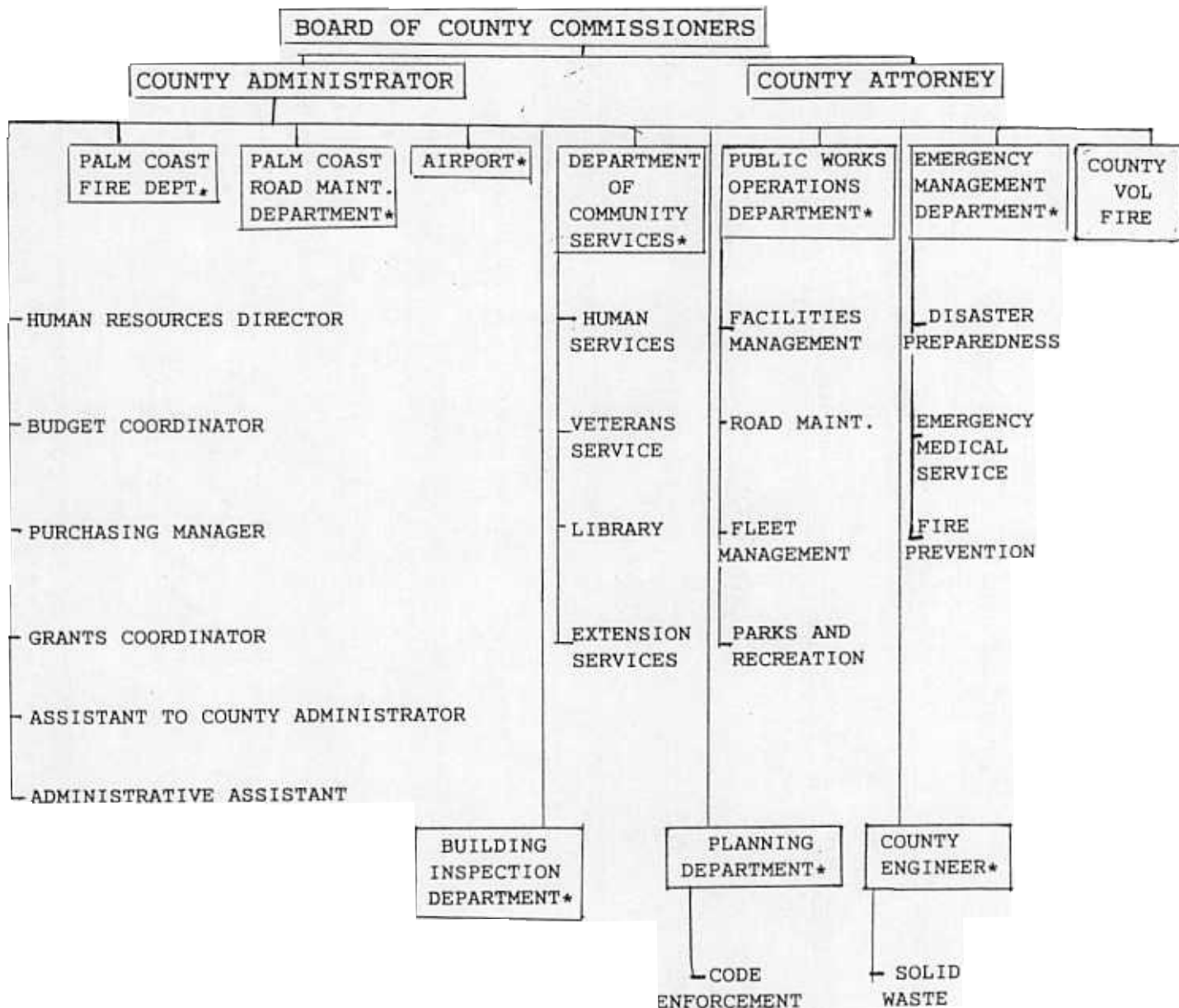
FLAGLER COUNTY GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



* denotes Department Head

APPENDIX B

FLAGLER COUNTY GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE PROPOSED 1999



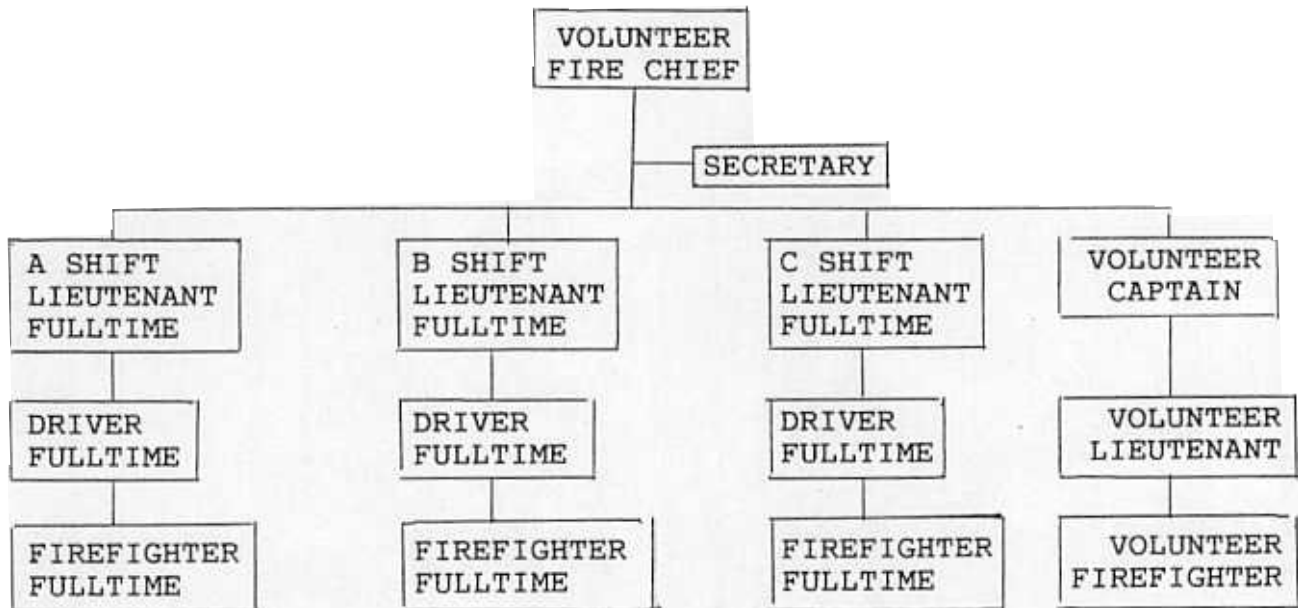
* DENOTES DEPARTMENT HEAD

APPENDIX C

FIRE SERVICES DIRECTOR: Flagler County Government is accepting completed County employment applications and resumes' for a Fire Services Director position working under the general supervision of the County Administrator. **DUTIES INCLUDE:** Supervise, direct, plan, and coordinate the activities of Flagler County volunteer fire departments. Develop, maintain, and ensure compliance with necessary fire services rules, policies, and procedures in accordance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and County policies. Prepare and administer the fire services budget. Direct the volunteer recruitment program. Knowledge of modern firefighting, incident command practices, principles, and procedures as well as current state and federal laws regarding all aspects of firefighting desired. **MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:** Eight(8)years of experience in suburban and rural fire protection including at least three (3) years as senior officer required. Certification as a firefighter under the Laws of the State of Florida required. Possession of a valid Florida Class "D" driver's license. State of Florida Emergency Medical Technician Certification, Fire Inspector Certification, and completion of an Emergency Operator Vehicle Course required within the first year of employment. Bachelor degree from an accredited college or university in Fire Science, Fire Administration, or related management field preferred. A comparable amount of training and/or experience may be substituted for the minimum qualifications except for required certification.

APPENDIX D

PALM COAST FIRE RESCUE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART 1994



APPENDIX E

PALM COAST FIRE RESCUE
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART 1999
PROPOSED